



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

26 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : The Growing Strength of North Vietnamese Army
Forces in South Vietnam

1. In response to the President's request, we have taken a fresh look at our data on North Vietnamese Army (NVA) strength in South Vietnam and the rates of North Vietnamese infiltration over recent months.

2. Force Levels. During the past three or four months there has been a dramatic increase in the movement of regular North Vietnamese Army units into South Vietnam. This Agency now believes that last fall (1 November) there were over 70,000 North Vietnamese soldiers fighting in South Vietnam. The number has risen rapidly in the past five months and today may be over 100,000. This increase in NVA strength in South Vietnam has been achieved despite the thousands of casualties suffered by the North Vietnamese in the intensified combat of the past two months.

3. The following tabulation shows what we believe to be the relative strengths of VC and NVA Main and Local forces as of 1 November 1967 and 25 March 1968, without adjustment for casualties:

	<u>1 November 1967</u>	<u>25 March 1968</u>
<u>NVA Forces</u>		
In NVA units	61,000	88,000
In VC units	<u>10,000</u>	<u>15,000</u>
Sub-total	71,000	103,000
<u>VC Forces</u>	71,000	61,000
Total	<u>142,000</u>	<u>164,000</u>

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4. The above tabulation shows that the relative strength of NVA forces probably increased from 50 percent of total Main and Local force strength on 1 November 1967 to 63 percent as of late March 1968. The relative strength of NVA forces is even greater when these figures are adjusted for the extraordinary casualties of the Tet offensive (30 January-21 February 1968). We have made a very rough and preliminary estimate that the bulk of these casualties were sustained by VC Main and Local forces (including guerrillas upgraded and attached to Local force units). We estimate tentatively that the infiltration of NVA fillers has been more than adequate to maintain NVA force levels at their pre-Tet level of some 100,000 troops. VC Main and Local force strength has probably declined to a level of about 45,000-50,000 troops.

5. Thus, we estimate that today there may be nearly two times as many North Vietnamese regular army soldiers in South Vietnam as there are VC regular (i.e., Main and Local force) soldiers. In the I Corps area, NVA units account for 80 percent of the enemy forces. On a country-wide basis North Vietnam now has nine divisions, consisting of 26 regiments, plus an additional 16 independent regimental equivalents deployed in South Vietnam. This compares to a VC Main and Local force strength of two divisions of three regiments each and an additional 22 regimental equivalents. Perhaps a third of what we carry as the "VC" force is actually composed of North Vietnamese Army personnel.

6. Infiltration. During the past four to five months, we believe Hanoi has moved at least two infantry divisions (the 304th and 320th) plus additional replacement or "filler" personnel into South Vietnam.

7. Official figures indicate that at least 5,600 North Vietnamese soldiers arrived in South Vietnam during November and December 1967. (This figure is almost identical to the total for the same period in 1966.) Most of last November and December's infiltrators were probably replacement personnel 25X1 for forces already in South Vietnam (both NVA and VC).

8. During November and December 1967 [REDACTED] that two entire North Vietnamese divisions (the 304th and the 320th) were moving toward South Vietnam. Components of these two divisions began to arrive in December, but neither are considered to have become operational in the south until January 1968. Each division probably had a strength of at least 8,000 men -- which accounts for most of the troops in MACV's infiltration total for January of 19,400 men. The remainder of this total was probably composed of miscellaneous groups of replacement personnel.

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9. The picture for the past two months, February and March, is much less clear, but it is one of a marked increase in the usual indicators of infiltration suggesting significant movement. As of 8 February, the number of

[redacted]
groups moving south. We are not sure of the personnel strength of any of these groups, but there is indirect evidence that they each approximate battalion strength -- about 400 men. 25X1

25X1 10. In addition, we have had unusually good evidence [redacted]
[redacted] in the month of March that battalion size groups are deploying southward through the central section of North Vietnam. More than 20 such groups have been noted in the period 2-25 March. Some of these groups may by now have progressed far enough south to be reflected [redacted]
[redacted] 25X1

11. We cannot provide firm figures for infiltration in February and March, but the evidence suggests that at least about 4,000 NVA troops entered South Vietnam in February and at least some 8,000 will arrive during the month of March.

25X1 12. In sum, we believe that something on the order of 35-40,000 NVA personnel have been infiltrated into South Vietnam since 1 November 1967. Furthermore, [redacted] indicates that the entire infiltration apparatus is under heavy pressure to accomplish a major deployment in the near future. While we cannot confidently estimate the size of this additional deployment, the available evidence suggests it could be on the order of magnitude of two division equivalents.

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Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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